

Message Text

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21

ACTION EA-10

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P R 110904Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8783

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 1605

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT KS

SUBJECT: JOURNALISTS PROTEST FIRINGS AT TWO LEADING SEOUL DAILIES

SUMMARY: MANAGEMENT OF CHOSUN ILBO HAS FIRED TOTAL OF TWELVE REPORTERS SINCE DECEMBER, TEN WITHIN LAST WEEK; DEMONSTRATING CHOSUN REPORTERS CLAIM ISSUE IS PRESS FREEDOM. TONGA ILBO REPORTERS ARE ALSO DEMANDING REHIRING OF TWENTY SUB-EDITORS AND REPORTERS RECENTLY FIRED BY TONGA MANAGEMENT. IN THIS CASE, TONGA PUBLISHER STATES FIRING WAS ORDERED BY SHAREHOLDERS, IS SUPPORTED BY REPORTERS, AND REASON FOR ACTIONS IS ECONOMIC. CHUNGANG ILBO REPORTEDLY HAS FIRED FOUR EDITORIAL WRITERS AND ROKG HAS CLOSED DOWN INFLUENTIAL KOREAN JOURNALIST WEEKLY. END SUMMARY.

1. ACCORDING TO USIS SOURCE, BACKGROUND TO REPORTERS' CURRENT PROTESTS AT CHOSUN ILBO IS AS FOLLOWS: IN DECEMBER, MANAGEMENT OF CHOSUN FIRED ONE FOREIGN NEWS AND ONE CULTURAL AFFAIRS DESK MAN AFTER THE TWO PROTESTED THAT A FEATURE STORY PUBLISHED BY CHOSUN HAD BEEN RUN AT INSTIGATION OF KCIA. ON MARCH7, CHOSUN MANAGEMENT FIRED FIVE REPORTERS WHO IT CLAIMED LED SIT-IN AT NEWSPAPER THAT DAY (CHOSUN'S 55TH ANNIVERSARY) AND WHO
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HAD REFUSED TO WORK UNTIL TWO REPORTERS FIRED IN

DECEMBER WERE REINSTATED. IN WAKE OF THIS FIRING, CHOSUN FIRED FIVE ADDITIONAL REPORTERS, WHO WERE ALL BOARD MEMBERS OF CHOSUN'S FLEDGLING UNION. THIS LAST FIRING FOLLOWED STATEMENT ISSUED BY PROTESTING CHOSUN JOURNALISTS AT SIT-IN, CALLING FOR PRESS FREEDOM AND DENOUNCING "COMP-NY" GUARDS WHO HAD BEEN STATIONED AT NEWSPAPER'S ENTRANCE.

2. MEANWHILE, ON MARCH 6, TONGA ILBO ALLEGEDLY DISMISSED EIGHTEEN SUB-EDITORS AND REPORTERS, ON GROUNDS OF NEWSPAPER'S FINANCIAL PROBLEMS RESULTING FROM ADVERTISING BOYCOTT ALLEGEDLY INSTIGATED BY ROKG. SUBSEQUENTLY, MARCH 11 TWO MORE REPORTERS WERE DISMISSED. EMBASSY SOURCES ESTIMATE 100 JOURNALISTS AT TONGA HAVE DEMANDED REHIRING OF THOSE DISMISSED, OFFERING TO TAKE REDUCTION IN SALARIES AND ALSO DEMANDING FREEDOM OF PRESS. SIT-IN REPORTEDLY CONTINUED THROUGH MARCH 11.

3. ON THE OTHER HAND, TONGA PUBLISHER KIM SANG MAN TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT THOSE FIRED WERE PRIMARILY MANAGEMENT TYPES, THAT REDUCTION IN FORCE WAS AN ECONOMY MOVE AGREED ON BY TONGA'S SHAREHOLDERS AND APPROVED BY TONGA'S REPORTERS AND THAT TONGA ADVERTISERS CONTINUED TO SHUN PAPER. HE INDICATED THAT TONGA WOULD INCREASINGLY FOLLOW A MORE EVEN-HANDED POLITICAL LINE. HE FURTHER NOTED THAT A FORMER EDITOR, RELIEVED UNDER GOVERNMENT PRESSURE IN 1971, HAD NOW BEEN REINSTATED AS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF.

4. CHUNGANG ILBO REPORTEDLY FIRED FOUR EDITORIAL WRITERS FOR UNDISCLOSED REASONS IN MARCH. AT SAME TIME, KOREAN JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION WEEKLY (OFTEN CRITICAL OF ROKG POLICIES AND NEWSPAPER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES) CLAIMS IT WAS ORDERED TO END PUBLICATION. MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND INFORMATION REPORTEDLY CANCELLED THEIR CHARTER ON MARCH 10 THOUGH MINISTRY SPOKESMAN HINTED PUBLICATION MAY BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE AS MONTHLY. THIS WOULD DESTROY ITS ROLE AS DISSEMINATOR OF FAST-BREAKING NEWS OF DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN PRESS COMMUNITY.

5. EXCEPT FOR KJA WEEKLY, ALL NEWSPAPERS ARE CONTINUING
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TO MEET THEIR DEADLINES AND PUBLISH. CHOSUN ILBO'S MORNING EDITION, HOWEVER, APPEARED TO BE POORLY EDITED, FEATURING LARGELY STRAIGHT PRESS SERVICE COPY.
COMMENT: WORKING PRESS AT BOTH TONGA ILBO AND CHOSUN ILBO SEE ROKG INFLUENCE BEHIND THE HARDLINE MANAGEMENT STANCE WHICH THEY FEEL HAS LED TO PROTESTS. THERE IS EVIDENCE HOWEVER, THAT THIS SERIES OF FIRINGS HAS BEEN COORDINATED BY EITHER MANagements WORKING TOGETHER OR GOVERNMENT

,
AND THERE ARE OTHER INDICATIONS THAT SOME FIRINGS MAY BE
DUE TO INTERNAL SITUATIONS AT INDIVIDUAL NEWSPAPERS.
CERTAINLY TONGA, FOR EXAMPLY, HAS BEEN IN BIND DUE
TO LOSS OF ADVERTISING REVENUE. REPORTERS' REACTIONS
APPEAR TO BE MIXTURE OF HARDLINE ANTI-GOVERNMENT FEELINGS,
SYMPATHETIC VIBRATIONS TOWARD FIRED FELLOW-JOURNALISTS
AND IN-HOUSE NEWSPAPER PROBLEMS. THERE IS NO SIGN YET OF ALL-
OUT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN LOWER LEVEL JOURNALISTS ON THE
ONE HAND AND THEIR MANAGMENT OR ROKG ON THE OTHER.
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